

# America's Present Time: Reviving MLB Attendance by Marketing to Gen Z

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## **Abstract**

Major League Baseball (MLB) has enjoyed steady financial growth in the recent past, which is largely attributed to media and sponsorship deals. Despite this growth, the league is losing favor with younger generations, namely Generation Z, and attendance rates are falling to historic lows with each new season. In order to sustain the financial growth of its league, MLB must better understand the attitudes and perceptions of Generation Z and thereby positively influence Generation Z attendance rates. To address these concerns, I have conducted 2 focus groups with Generation Z undergraduate students at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill that illustrate Generation Z's attitudes, beliefs, and feelings about MLB, attending sporting events, and influences of their consumer behavior. With the participants' insights, I have considered a few key marketing recommendations that have the potential to help usher in a new generation of MLB fans.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Major League Baseball (MLB), formed in 1903, boasts a storied past, and while its current revenue of \$9.9 billion hints at success to come (Gough, 2019), the league's future is clouded by falling attendance and an outdated brand (Estes, 2019). The fans of "America's pastime" are aging, and newer and potential fans are being boxed out as a result of rising ticket prices (MacLennan, 2017). The rising prices should not be MLB's only point of concern, however, for a poll at the end of the 2018 season indicated that only 15 percent of Gen Z individuals (aged 18-21) claimed MLB to be their favorite professional sport. On the other hand, 37 percent chose the National Football League (NFL) and 28 percent chose the National Basketball Association (NBA). MLB was even losing ground to the traditionally unpopular Major League Soccer (MLS) which garnered 12 percent (Easley, 2018). Unless America's younger generations are offered a valuable experience in exchange for their tickets, the continued growth of MLB is not guaranteed.

Even as MLB's total revenue is growing, attendance continues to fall. Although the MLB lost \$93.7 million in ticket revenue and an additional \$50 million in concessions sales, its total revenue increased because of TV and streaming (Mathewson, 2019). For example, a streaming-media rights deal with the sports streaming service DAZN and a \$5.1 billion deal with FOX slated for 2022 will accelerate the financial growth of the league (Brown, 2019). MLB has undoubtedly benefitted from lucrative streaming deals, yet the growth of the league will not be sustainable if no one is in the seats.

Although decreasing MLB attendance may not appear to be an issue in the short term, the long-term effects have the potential to be devastating. Without consistent flow of fans going to

the games, the MLB will struggle to sell the entire “baseball experience.” Instead, people might opt to watch on their screens until they become bored, and customer lifetime value is likely to depreciate significantly. “Right now, the smart money is in all these media contracts,” notes sports writer Will Leitch, “but any sports fan knows that the true iron of lifelong dedication to a team or a sport is forged from the in-person experience; media will change, but the sport itself will not” (Leitch, 2019).

Given this information, MLB must offer a sufficient value exchange for attending games: a valuable experience at a sufficient price point. It is imperative that the MLB couples a new pricing strategy with an enhanced in-game experience that will make attending games worthwhile again. By delivering satisfactory value exchange at the forefront of this plan, the MLB can better address their attendance woes. Success will be determined by a rise in attendance, and driving factor of this will be a new experience surrounding the sport that delights younger generations.

This thesis seeks to understand Gen Z and millennials’ perceptions of the MLB that will inform a series of marketing recommendations. Additionally, the thesis will identify feasible price points at which these younger generations are willing to purchase game tickets. The next section will review the literature on sports marketing theories, millennial and Gen Z consumer behavior and preferences, and the range of marketing materials essential to the success of this plan.

## **Literature Review**

### **Major League Baseball and Younger Generations**

To sustain its success, MLB must usher in new, younger generations of fans (MacLennan, 2017). Gen Z makes up 27.9 percent of the U.S. population (U.S. Census, 2019)

and accounts for 40 percent of the purchasing power in the United States (SheerID, 2019).

Although it is vital that the league understand the perceptions, beliefs, and lifestyles of these potential fans. MLB has struggled to engage the fast-growing Gen Z, as only 15% of those aged 18-21 years claim MLB as their favorite professional sports league. By comparison, they favor the NFL and NBA at 37 percent and 28 percent respectively (Easley, 2018).

MLB is currently targeting these generations in a number of ways. Despite the limited scholarly coverage of existing generation-specific marketing plans in MLB, Sports Business Daily highlights a few marketing tactics that MLB uses to attract Gen Zers. “The launch of MLB.TV in 2002 and the At Bat mobile app in 2012 gave MLB the lead in putting games where young fans were spending their time — online” (Gennaro, 2019). MLB realized that younger viewers were abandoning TV for other mediums like phones, tablets, and computers, and so they delivered their products to them there. In addition to meeting Gen Z fans where they were consuming content, MLB has also tailored the content itself to the interests of Gen Z fans.

One attraction to MLB for younger generations is the analytical side of the game. Few sports are more data-driven and analytical than baseball, and younger fans seem to be attracted to MLB’s new launch angle, exit velocity, and advanced pitch-tracer tools (Gennaro, 2019). More recently, MLB has addressed the issue of their aging brand. While acknowledging baseball’s historic roots as “America’s Pastime,” MLB’s 2019 Postseason “We Play Loud” campaign embraces the vibrant, revolutionary personalities of the young players that populate the league today. The “We Play Loud” campaign was part of “an initiative that will further highlight [MLB’s] young core of spirited personalities” (MLB.com, 2019). This campaign likely was the result of research focused on Gen Z perceptions of contemporary sports. For example, the Gen Z fan has a deeper devotion to individual athletes rather than teams: “When asked if they are bigger



fans of specific athletes or teams and leagues, Gen Z favors athletes by a margin of 2-to-1 over baby boomers” (Gennaro, 2019).

MLB’s most recent “We Play Loud” campaign is not MLB’s only attempt to draw in younger fans, namely those of Gen Z. A year prior in 2018, MLB launched its “Let the Kids Play” campaign, with advertisements narrated by Hall of Famer Ken Griffey Jr. Mirroring Griffey’s in-your-face, electric playstyle, the advertisement supported the smack-talking, bat-flipping “new era” of baseball that contrasts the traditional, bland image of the game that follows baseball’s gentlemanly “unwritten rules” (Snyder, 2019). For a sport trying to rebrand and move away from its antiquated image, this seems to be a good starting point.

The “We Play Loud” and “Let the Kids Play” MLB branding campaigns effectively target younger generation fans; however, there is little evidence to suggest that MLB has instilled a marketing plan with the goal of driving attendance. In addition to expanding the branding campaign into next season, a successful marketing plan also must increase attendance levels. This goal can only be achieved by applying sports marketing theories to current Gen Z and millennial consumer behaviors and preferences.

## **Sports Marketing**

Since its inception, “sports marketing” has fallen under several different definitions, applications, and theories throughout the development of the field. In *Sports Marketing*, Fetchko, Roy, and Clow (2019) define sports marketing as “the use of marketing for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging sports experiences that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society” (p. 7). The discipline is also “made up of two distinct elements: 1) marketing *of* sports and 2) marketing *through* sports” (p. 7). For the purpose of this proposed thesis, an MLB marketing plan would fall under “marketing *of* sports.”

Fetchko, Roy and Clow (2019) also cite three main contributions of sports marketing to an organization: serving as a catalyst to create customer value, developing and nurturing customer relationships, and connecting the organization with the external environment (p. 9).

**Creating Customer Value.** Sports leagues create customer value by increasing perceived benefits received or reducing perceived sacrifices. Examples of how the MLB has augmented perceived benefits to help drive attendance include bobble-head giveaway nights and pyrotechnics displays at ballparks. Reducing sacrifices to attend games also can drive attendance. One way the MLB has done this is to offer ticket bundles to fans at a reduced per-game price (Fetchko, Roy, and Clow, 2019, p. 10). The MLB season is long and some consumers are not interested or cannot afford to purchase season tickets for every game.

At the root of creating customer value lies the management of exchange, whereby “marketing is concerned with influencing and controlling the transfer of value between buyers and sellers” (Blythe, 2009). If an organization can use marketing to create enough value for its customer to make a purchase, it has successfully exchanged value with that customer.

**Customer Relationship Management (CRM).** CRM operates tangentially to the value exchange between organization and customer, for it is “is built on the principle of establishing, maintaining, and enhancing mutually successful relationships, where value is created for all parties” (Abeza, Finch, O’Reilly, MacIntosh, Nadeau, 2019, p. 343). In sports marketing, maintaining and enhancing the relationship with the customer is essential, for becoming a lifelong fan of a sport or team makes someone a lifelong customer. More lifelong customers translates into more recurring profit. It is also important to note that it costs less to retain an existing customer than to gain a new one.

Abeza, Finch, O'Reilly, MacIntosh, and Nadeau (2018) conducted a review of CRM studies as they apply to sports. A few of the studies connected CRM to attendance, indicating that the CRM process relates to driving attendance. A 2006 study by Bee and Kahle connected the variables of retention and attendance to a three-tiered framework of relationship formation and maintenance involving compliance, identification, and internalization, in which the fan becomes more likely to attend a team's event with each tier. The first of these, compliance, is the result of an individual becoming a fan through group or individual influence, because he or she gains certain rewards or avoids certain punishments. In the next tier, identification occurs when a fan wants to strengthen his or her relationship with a team by seeing a player or a team as an extension of his or herself. The third and strongest tier, internalization, results in the individual sharing identity and beliefs with his or her team. CRM is strengthened by moving individuals through these tiers through meaningful fan experiences.

**External Factors.** When creating a strategic marketing plan, it is imperative to recognize the external factors that will influence the organization and the customer. These external factors can be identified through the opportunities and threats portions of a SWOT analysis. A SWOT analysis evaluates an organization's overall strengths (S), weaknesses (W), opportunities (O), and threats (T). It is helpful because it summarizes the current situation – a snapshot in time. It then informs planning. Externally, opportunities involve favorable trends in the environment that the organization may be able to exploit, whereas threats are unfavorable factors that can challenge performance (Armstrong & Kotler, 2020).

A SWOT Analysis is a key component of a marketing plan, and it is pivotal to acknowledge how external factors affect both the consumer and the organization itself. These external factors can include competition, the economy, public policy, sociocultural trends, and

advancements in technology (Fetchko, Roy, and Clow, 2019). A SWOT analysis is included at the end of this literature review to summarize the collective strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for MLB.

<p><b><u>Strengths</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The premier baseball league in the world</li> <li>➤ Growing annual revenue, including future TV contracts</li> <li>➤ New, exciting young players in the league</li> <li>➤ Large, loyal fan base</li> <li>➤ Range of ticket bundles</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Weaknesses</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Lack of younger fans as older fans age out</li> <li>➤ Declining attendance</li> <li>➤ Slow pace of play</li> <li>➤ Cheating scandals in the game</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Opportunities</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Gen Z attraction towards experiences</li> <li>➤ International interest in baseball, especially in Japan and South America</li> <li>➤ Expanding technology across sports for a more immersive fan experience</li> <li>➤ Gen Z comfortability with technology</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Threats</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Rising popularity of MLS and NBA</li> <li>➤ Rise of shorter attention spans not suitable for baseball</li> <li>➤ Increasing experience options attractive to younger generation</li> </ul>

### **Generation Z Consumer Preferences and Behavior**

Generation Z is made up of 61 million Americans born from 1997 to roughly 2011, aging from 8 to 23 years in 2019 (Statista, 2019). They are similar to millennials in that they are

digitally saturated, have a concern for sustainability, and have a keen interest in experiences. But they are different when it comes to their priorities and spending habits (Marks, 2019).

Gen Zers also have seen the financial struggles of the millennials before them, making them hesitant to take on debt or spend beyond their means. Their annual spending power ranges from \$29 billion to \$143 billion, and these numbers will increase as Gen Z ages (Marks, 2019). Connections can be made between the existing research on Gen Z spending habits and their susceptibility to attending MLB games or identifying with the league. In a 2019 survey of Gen Z spending habits, Synchrony Financial found that 75% prefer shopping in stores with engaging in-store experiences; 64% prefer shopping in stores vs. online; and 45% say the experience of buying something is just as important as the product itself. While these statistics are in the scope of retail, they can be translated to spectator sports, for attending a game represents an “in-store experience” and streaming a game represents “shopping online.”

Valuable to cultivating a fan base for MLB is research that provides an understanding of Gen Z consumer perceptions. A Ernst and Young (2019) survey of Gen Zers, for example, found that only 30% of respondents view loyalty programs as a positive thing; 55% prefer brands that are eco-friendly and socially responsible; 53% choose brands that better understand them as an individual; and 70% favor YouTube influencers who are relatable and real versus traditional celebrity endorsers.

### **Millennial Consumers' Perceptions and Behaviors**

The millennial generation, or Generation Y, consists of 72 million Americans born between 1981 and 1996, aging from 23 to 38 years in 2019 (Statista, 2019). Millennials, broadly speaking, are struggling with financial concerns, including student debt and inability to purchase a home. In a 2019 report on millennial spending habits, Lexington Law sees that 48% of

millennials reported that they are living paycheck to paycheck (Marks, 2019). Perhaps counterintuitively, they represent \$600 billion of annual U.S. spending power. Millennials represent early adopters of new technologies such as internet and cellphones, now commonplace. Preceding Gen Z, millennials are increasingly able to purchase more as they ease into financial stability.

That same technology figures prominently in millennials' spending habits. Marks (2019) found that 63% complete transactions on their smartphones; 54% of their purchases are made online; 41% of smartphone users have completed an in-store transaction with their mobile device; and 83% are not concerned about security while online shopping.

While the above statistics refer to retail trends, they relate to media use in spectator sports purchasing. For this marketing plan, millennial online and mobile purchase tendencies will be taken into account (Merriman, 2015).

Millennials' consumer perceptions also provide a contrast to those of Gen Z. For example, they are more likely than any other generation to stay loyal to a brand because of a loyalty rewards program. Marks (2019) survey found that 81% of millennial respondents expect companies to make a public commitment to charitable causes and citizenship; 67% believe they have a responsibility to share feedback with a brand about their experience; and millennial parents expect brands to provide value for their money and proper customer service.

It is important to understand thoroughly one's target audience when developing a strategic marketing plan. This proposed thesis draws upon established sports marketing theories, consumer information on Gen Zers and millennials, and original research to match the needs of MLB as it works to foster this important generation of fans. This will likely involve the MLB

broadening its base and creating an affordable entertainment experience inclusive of younger generations of fans.

## Chapter 2

### Research Questions

1. What are Gen Z's<sup>1</sup> perceptions of the MLB?
2. What are perceived benefits of attending?
3. What are perceived barriers of attending?
4. What factors would best persuade Gen Z target markets to attend MLB games?

### Method

**Focus Groups.** Focus groups can be used to better understand participants' "perceptions, feelings, and thinking about issues, ideas, products, services, or opportunities" in order to "gain understanding about a topic, so decision makers can make more informed choices" (Krueger, Casey, 2015). Focus groups are a common market research method used to elicit beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions from small groups of people regarding a product, service, or other issue of interest (Armstrong and Kotler, 2020). According to Armstrong and Kotler (2020), a focus group consists of inviting six to ten people to meet with a professional moderator to talk about a product, service, or organization. Mini-focus groups consist of four to six people instead of six to ten. Mini-focus groups can yield the same insights as larger groups, but move more quickly and are easier to execute.

Two mini-focus groups were conducted with Gen Z undergraduate students from UNC-Chapel Hill who watch sports on television and have attended at least one professional sporting event in person. This participant profile was selected because secondary research suggests that MLB must connect with the fast-growing Gen Z market in order to survive. Furthermore, the focus group participants were comprised of younger sports fans, because it was essential that the

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<sup>1</sup> The Pre-COVID plan was to conduct focus groups with both Gen Z and millennial participants. Due to significant lags in IRB review and COVID-19, the decision was made to conduct focus groups solely with Gen Z participants.



participants understood the experience of attending a professional sporting event in person, since the goal of this study was to drive attendance. Both male and female participants were recruited, as females represent 30 percent of MLB fans (The Shelf, 2019).

The two focus groups took place on Friday, April 3, 2020 and each lasted approximately one hour. One focus group was comprised of five participants (one male and four females) and another focus group was comprised of six participants (one male and five females). Of the eleven participants, only three were MLB fans, and the rest were general sports fans. Nearly every focus group participant had attended an MLB game. All participants were 18+ and were recruited from the Hussman School of Journalism and Media undergraduate student research pool. This study being reviewed by UNC-Chapel Hill Institutional Review Board and was found to be exempt.

Focus groups were conducted through private Zoom conference calls, using a semi-structured discussion guide that allowed prescribed questions to be answered, but also allowed for other relevant information to emerge (see Appendix D for the focus group guide). Each participant received one hour of research credit for their participation. Focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed through the Zoom software and analyzed for emergent themes.

Both focus groups began with the researcher asking participants to share his or her best in-person sporting event experience. Participants were then asked to share their perceptions of watching sports on television, attending professional sporting events in person, and similar questions specifically concerning MLB. The initial questions revolved around professional sports in general and focused on the differences between watching on television and attending in person, followed by a discussion about barriers and incentives to attending professional sporting events. The final set of interview questions posed a hypothetical scenario that placed the

participants in a city with easy access to an MLB team and inquired about factors that might influence attendance at games.

### **Limitations**

As with most studies, there were limitations to the methodology. Some focus group participants had not watched MLB on television or attended a game, which limited more nuanced responses. At the same time, these participants were able to offer valuable insight as to why they had not watched a game before, which was rooted in their perception of MLB as a whole.

Another issue was the small sample drawn solely of Gen Z sports fans from the Hussman School of Media and Journalism at UNC-Chapel Hill. While the participants met the criteria of being Gen Z sports fans who have attended a professional sporting event, they likely are not representative of Gen Z sports fans across the nation. The COVID-19 situation and the long time to secure IRB exemption precluded the opportunity to recruit participants more widely across campus and still meet honors thesis submission deadlines.

## Chapter 3

### Findings

#### Live Sports Television and Streaming Benefits

Throughout discussion about watching sports on live television and streaming, four major themes emerged outlining the motivators and benefits of using this medium: 1) leisurely nature of viewing, 2) social interaction, 3) immersive broadcast, and 4) a way to support the team.

**Leisurely nature of viewing.** Many of the participants find watching live sporting events on television to be an enjoyable leisure experience. Several participants in each focus group appreciated the freedom to engage simultaneously in another activity rather than being forced to watch the game in person. The ease of watching the game in the comfort of their own home on their own terms was important to them.

Participants across both focus groups noted enjoying the social nature of television viewing over attending a game in person. According to one participant:

“...and like watch like almost in the background, but like, pay attention when you need to. And I also like like that you can like invite people over and like make it into like parties and stuff.” Female, FG2

Television viewing better allows the sports fan to interact with others, and also serve as a party host.

**Social interaction.** Further, several participants noted a social, familial aspect to viewing games on television that they found appealing. For example, one participant shared:

“It’s something that I really like connect with like my little brother on because he’s super into sports, so like the fact that, like we can sit down for like two hours or something or like watch football game or like watching the cross or any sport like it’s really fun to like get like close my family do that.” Female, FG1

The above quote shows how sports serve as a vessel for family togetherness, and live games on television is a good center for that togetherness.

**Immersive broadcast.** Some participants shared that watching a game on television was actually more immersive than watching in person, particularly due to the camerawork and technology today lets you get a better view than if you were inside the stadium – especially if you do not have good seats.

With regards to modern technology’s capability of delivering an immersive broadcast experience, it is all about the closeness to the game. One participant noted:

“But I think one aspect that I really enjoy watching on TV and stuff is just how close you can get to the players and to the plays... Camera work has progressed so much lately, and like we have such high tech TVs now that you really feel like you're there.” Female, FG2

In addition to the good views, one participant also added that they get to hear a knowledgeable take on the game that is only offered through watching the game live on television:

“I like to listen to the announcers and like hear, like a more knowledgeable take on the game... I’ve watched like I know a fair amount about, but it's still helpful to like hear what announcers are saying. And when you're there in person, you don't really get that.” Female, FG2

Participants noted that these are appealing elements of TV broadcast that are not available when attending sporting events in person.

**A way to support their team.** Lastly many participants noted that they watch games on television to follow their favorite team. In all cases, they stated that this is because they are not able to attend games in person, since they are college students away from their favorite teams, but they follow the games on television to feel a sense of camaraderie with and loyalty to their team.

In many cases, television is the only way for fans to be able to watch their favorite team because of proximity restraints. When asked about following a team on television solely because of their loyalty to the team, one participant shared:

“I definitely got into a sports team, which is what kept me following sports. I got into the Red Sox because my family is like from that area, and so once I started like watching and like bonding with my dad over it, that's when I actually like got into sports.” Female, FG1

Since this participant is a Boston Red Sox fan that has kept following the team despite their geographical dissonance from the team, watching games on television is her best option of viewing games.

### **General Sports Event Attendance Benefits**

When discussing the benefits of attending sporting events, participants highlighted a few factors that they found to be most influential. The three major themes included: 1) atmosphere, 2) sense of community, and 3) higher engagement.

**Atmosphere.** Participants in both focus groups had a lot to say about the atmosphere of attending sporting events in person. They agreed that the noise level and intensity of attending a live sporting event cannot be replicated through television. For example:

“I think one of the biggest things, which is certainly a shock for people going to this first event kind of is just how how loud it is, especially if it's like basketball, or baseball or just whatever it might be. It's just so much more intense than just watching on TV.” Male, FG1

The loud, exciting environment described above was described by nearly all focus group members as a big reason why they enjoyed attending games in person. Another participant described the atmosphere as the sole motivator for attending a sporting event in person:

“I think the atmosphere of a sporting event like makes that experience so much more enjoyable than watching it on TV, and you feel like weirdly connected to everyone around you and the energy is like so high. So I think that's what makes attending them fun.” Female, FG1

The atmosphere described here was a powerful motivator for many participants, and it tied into another benefit of attending sporting events in person, a sense of community.

**Sense of community.** In addition to the tangible aspects of the atmosphere, participants also felt like they shared a sense of community with everyone in the stadium when they attended games.

“You definitely don't really feel that energy when you're at home like there's definitely a social aspect at home that you can watch it with whoever you want, but I think there's like an added layer of being at a stadium and watching it with like people that you wouldn't otherwise come in contact with, but they're like there for the same reason that you are, which is really cool.” Female, FG2

Another participant noted that this sense of community is often shared in a common fandom, or loyalty to a team that is felt when attending a game in person:

“Um, so yeah, it's just like the unity, like everyone feels the same way about whatever's happening in the game because you're all supporting that one team... It's just really cool.” Male, FG2

In these examples, the participants shared how a unique sense of community can exist among total strangers when attending a game in person, and that sense of community is valuable to them.

**Higher engagement.** The participants also discussed that when they attend games in person, they pay much more attention to each play. This increased engagement with the game makes it a more enjoyable experience. One participant explained this when she said:

“I think when you're watching something like on TV and stuff, it's really easy to get distracted and like look at multiple screens and just like also like commercial breaks are really annoying, but then it's like when you're at a game, you're kind of just like constantly engaged, which is really nice.” Female, FG1

Another participant shared the same sentiment:

“When you're like in the stadium and you're actually watching it, you can hear like if something like exciting starts to happen. People get excited and make noise. So you like start to pay attention.” Female, FG1

This higher engagement with the game was described by multiple participants as a motivator for attending a sporting event in person, and they agreed that they seemed to enjoy games more if they were more engaged with them.

### **General Sports Event Attendance Barriers**

For sports in general, the participants in each group shared and discussed their primary barriers to attending sporting events in person. Their insights reflected three major barriers: 1) added costs, 2) proximity, and 3) weather.

**Added costs.** The added costs of attending sporting events proved to be the most powerful for the participants of each focus group. Participants mentioned high ticket prices, cost of travel, high concessions prices, and expensive parking all as reasons to not attend a sporting event. One participant described these added costs as barriers when describing attending a Lakers game:

“I went to a Lakers game at the Staples Center with a friend and we bought the cheapest tickets that they had which were 40 bucks and the Staples Center is huge. And they were literally like total nosebleed section like basically horrible seats and that was \$40 and includes Uber to get there, or any food or drinks that we bought there, and then you can barely see the actual game, you’re so far up you end up looking at the screens like the Jumbo Tron anyway, which is basically what’s on TV.” Female, FG1

Another participant shared a strong point regarding the large investment of attending in person being a barrier when he said:

“Boy, the added cost of everything... Sometimes it’s just like not worth just going out of your way... The chance of losing too.” Male, FG2

These examples show that the participants consider financial barriers when deciding if they should attend a sporting event or not. The bulk of these financial barriers, according to the participants, are the added costs of attending a game.

**Proximity.** Proximity was described as a barrier for most participants, as many of them claimed that they did not have easy geographical access to a lot of professional sports teams. For example, one participant claimed:

“A lot of people have allegiance like teams that aren't near them. So like my dad like my family, friends, since since they're from like New England area. Our allegiance is like all like New England teams and I'm from Florida, so we don't get to go to them very often.” Female, FG1

As illustrated by this participant’s comment, it is difficult to attend a sporting event if one is geographically removed from the team he or she cheers for.

**Weather.** Each focus group’s participants expressed that bad weather would prevent them from attending a game. Especially for outdoor sports, participants noted that it would not be worth attending a game if the weather outside was bad. When initially asked what would prevent them from attending a professional sporting event in person, one participant described how bad weather has made NFL games less enjoyable:

“Weather honestly if it's an outside thing. I've been to a number of NFL games that you know like paid money for and they're like miserably hot or like raining, like the stadium's open. Or it's like winter and you're like, damn, this really sucks.” Female, FG2

According to this participant, bad weather can make attending a sporting event in person unenjoyable.

### **Perceptions of MLB**

Echoing the secondary research, many focus group participants had poor views of MLB centered around: 1) a lack of exciting characteristics, 2) lasting too long, and 3) being entertaining only if one is a fan of a team or understands the game very well.

### **Non-MLB Fans’ Perceptions**



**Lack of exciting characteristics.** In both focus groups, there was almost unanimous sentiment that MLB was boring. There were no responses from non-MLB fans to suggest otherwise, as almost all participants made statements regarding the blandness of baseball. When first asked to describe the experience of watching an MLB game, one participant immediately answered:

“Well, boring. It's too long and everybody knows that. And the MLB knows that, too.” Male, FG1

As seen in this quotation, a lack of excitement is naturally coupled with the sentiment that MLB games are entirely too long. These two themes often accompanied one another throughout the focus groups.

**Duration.** Almost every focus group participant claimed that MLB games were far too long. Across the board this was a common factor barring participants from enjoying MLB games. One participant went in depth about the pace of the game:

“Um, I think my part of it is the length of it... Towards the like hour and a half mark, I'm like this is way too long, like what is happening now. Like, they're gonna finish it like nobody really scores either like it takes forever to like get a run and stuff. And I'm like, this is getting really slow.” Female, FG2

Others shared that it was not only the length of the games that made them not like MLB, but also the length of the season. For example, one participant noted:

“I feel like it's also like not really necessary to watch a lot of the games because there's so many of them like one game doesn't really matter that much like in some other sports like they don't have as many games like each game like matters more but in baseball it's just like, oh, just another game. Like, who cares about this one.” Female, FG1

Both of the above quotations show that the participants do not enjoy the pace of MLB games or the length of the MLB season.

## **MLB Fans' Perceptions.**

As noted earlier, of the 11 total participants, only 3 identified as MLB fans. Further, these 3 individuals were fans of specific teams, which resulted in them being fans of the league as well. As predicted, these participants enjoyed baseball, but they did express that they could understand why others might not enjoy it.

**Fandom or understanding.** MLB fans expressed that they understood how MLB could not be entertaining to others, given the previous two themes of lacking exciting characteristics and being too long. They also added that being a fan of a team or having a certain level of understanding the game of baseball were keys to enjoying MLB. For example, one MLB fan responded to a non-MLB fan in one of the focus groups who called baseball as a sport “slow and boring” saying:

“A lot of my friends say that baseball is boring and they just like don't like it because they don't like that takes so long, like the games are always really really long. So if you like don't know what's going on, or just like don't really care about a team like I can definitely see how it wouldn't be interesting at all.”

Here, it is clear that even Gen Z MLB fans understand reasons for why others would not like MLB. The participant who provided this quotation also recognizes that someone would likely not enjoy MLB if they did not have a team to cheer for or if they did not understand the game very well. Another participant provides the same rationale for liking the game as he says:

“I think it's entertaining if you like know everything that's going on and like are rooting for a specific team.” Male, FG2

In sum, focus group participants, MLB fans and non-MLB fans alike, consider games to be seldom action-packed and exciting, and entirely too long. However, MLB fans who participated in the focus groups insisted that cheering for a specific team or understanding the game well would make MLB more entertaining and interesting.

## **Motivations for watching MLB Television and Streaming**

In both of the focus groups, it became clear that both MLB fans and non-fans thought that watching MLB games on television was a passive experience, and they only watched them in some special circumstances. Non-MLB fans said that would only watch MLB games on television if there was a close game in the last innings or a playoff game on television. In a similar vein, MLB fans admitted that they would watch games for the same reason above, or if their favorite team is playing.

**Exciting games on television.** Non-MLB sports fans, like the ones represented in this focus group, rarely watched MLB games on television. They said that the only time they would watch a game, is if it was a Playoff game or a close game in the final innings:

“I think if I were to, I don’t know, tune into a baseball game, it’d probably just be at the end of the last few innings. If it ends up being close and looks like it’s gonna be a decent finish, sure.” Male, FG1

Non-MLB fans were hard-pressed to ever voluntarily watch an MLB game on television, but the focus groups showed that this was the exception for why they would watch a game.

**Favorite team on television.** For the MLB fans who participated in the focus groups, they also agreed that they would watch games on television if a playoff game or close game in the final innings was playing. However, they also shared that the majority of the games they watch involve their favorite teams. One participant, who is fan of the Dodgers, described watching her team on TV as a “relaxing” experience:

“I like watching and like hearing. I think for the Dodgers especially like I’m hearing like Vin Scully when I was like growing up is like a big part of it because like he would do the commentating and everything, but now it’s more just like so I can like just kind of relax and like watch from my own like comfortable couch... So it’s just kind of more relaxing.” Female, FG2

The experience of watching MLB games on television were described as passive from both non-MLB fans and MLB fans, and they would only watch the games in special circumstances.

### **MLB Attendance Benefits**

Unlike the discussion surrounding watching MLB on television, nearly every focus group participant had attended an MLB game before. Many participants discussed a number of benefits of attending MLB games and other elements that could incentivize them to attend more games in the future. The major themes included 1) social, 2) financial, and 3) philanthropic incentives to attending.

**Social.** Most participants noted the social aspects of game attendance as a motivator. The participants who were MLB fans would attend to watch their favorite team play, but they also said that they would attend games that their team was not involved in if it meant going out with their friends. Many participants provided anecdotes of just how powerful the social attraction of attending a game was. One of these, for example, described going to a Mets game with friends:

“It's just like a really big like neighborhood gathering thing. So again, it's like that sense of like camaraderie and like everyone's supporting the same thing. It's like that's like a big driver for me to go out like if a lot of my friends are going to a professional game and like you can get Mets tickets like super cheap and just like take the train into the city.” Female, FG1

The social incentive in this example lies within the participant's opportunity to do something fun with her friends. For her, she mentioned that a big social incentive was if her friends were going to the game as well. In another example of a social incentive, one participant explained the social scene surrounding an MLB game:

“I think like the social scene in the area before and after the game would make it more worth like the whole like dedicating that much time to going to a baseball game because then you can like have fun and like pre game before and like a fun area and you can also like, have a good time. That night with like a bunch of friends like that would be me the whole like experience more enjoyable and worth it.” Female, FG1

Here, the participant explains that the financial and physical investment of attending an MLB game becomes more worthwhile if there is a social experience surrounding the game itself. In this case, a night out with friends could include more than just the MLB game.

**Financial.** Another important motivator for participants was the financial aspect of attending a game. Since many participants were not MLB fans, they expressed that tickets and added costs would need to be cheap or free in order for them to attend a game. One focus group member noted that due to the length of the games, concessions are almost unavoidable, and they would be more likely to attend if they knew that the prices would be more affordable. For example:

“If it was like, you can go to the basketball, baseball game and your food in there is like really cheap or free that would definitely incentivize me to go and sit through the whole thing.” Female, FG2

Mitigating the added costs of attending MLB games was important to the focus group participants, but a couple of participants noted that they would be more responsive to a philanthropic incentive.

**Philanthropic.** An interesting incentive mentioned multiple times was the idea of integrating philanthropy into ticket sales. The idea that the money one spends on a ticket to attend a game is going to a good cause proved to be a strong incentive for some of the focus group participants. One of the participants explained:

“I think if they were supporting a special cause or something, and they were like, oh, like a portion of the ticket sales will be donated to this like I think like that would really be a good driver for me because I don't think that I would attend just for like the pure love baseball, so just like a part of it was going to like an organization or cause that I supported, I'd be like, oh, yeah, sure. Like, why not like, I'll just, I'll help out, etc.” Female, FG1

The philanthropic elements discussed by the participants were brought up naturally when discussing financial incentives. While some participants claimed that they would be motivated to attend MLB games if the total cost of attending were lowered, some insisted that they still would not be motivated to attend. The participants who were unaverred by financial incentives were the same participants who recommended philanthropic incentives.

Consistent with the theme of both focus groups, the vast majority of incentives were both social and financial. Considering that many of the participants considered their main reason for attending games to be a “social night out”, and many of the participants were not MLB fans, they found it important that their enjoyment did not entirely depend on the game itself. In addition to recommending philanthropic incentives, participants also stated that they would respond positively towards more conventional incentives, such as cheaper ticket prices and cheaper concessions.

### **MLB Attendance Barriers**

While affordability, philanthropy, and the social aspect of attending MLB games proved to be strong incentives for the Gen Z participants, there still were plenty of barriers that they discussed that would keep them from attending MLB games. However, there was only one barrier to attending MLB games that was different from barriers to attending any other professional sporting event that was discussed in the focus groups: the time commitment.

**Time commitment.** A significant barrier is the time commitment. The majority of participants agreed that they did not want to be present in the stadium for an entire baseball game. One of the participants explained:

“And I think due to that time commitment you just have like, I mean, there's so much other things to do. Like you can get so much more out of your day. I think with like nine innings of like play that I think I could just be like, more efficient

doing something else... So if I'm maximizing my fun, I would probably do something rather than watching the game sitting there.” Female, FG2

More obvious barriers that were discussed included extra costs such as parking and concessions as well as logistical barriers like traffic and proximity. However, these barriers to attendance exist in every professional sport, so it is important to focus on those that are endemic to MLB and Gen Z.

### **Key Insights**

Three actionable insights emerged from the focus groups: 1) creating a social experience around game attendance is a necessity; 2) incorporating philanthropy into ticket sales will further incentivize Gen Z sports fans to attend games; and 3) prioritizing affordability is essential.

**Social experience.** The most important aspect to be derived from all of the input from the focus groups can be summarized by the following quotation:

*“I find baseball really boring... I literally go for the social aspect of it.”*

Understanding that a social experience is at the center of this generation’s desires is an important first step. More research will be required to discover how to best cater to this craving. Nevertheless, it is pivotal that MLB offers valuable auxiliary experiences to Gen Z that surround the game without depending on direct enjoyment from the game itself. The length and nature of the game does not necessarily have to be altered in order to encourage attendance, but the social experience that comes with the game must make the financial and time investment worthwhile. Since going to an MLB game is such a remarkable time investment, those attending should expect a remarkable day or night of enjoyment. Many Gen Zers are hesitant to attend MLB games, because during the time that it takes to attend a game, they could be “maximizing their fun” elsewhere.

**Philanthropy.** As discovered in the focus groups, Gen Zers would respond positively to incentives that tie in their ticket purchase with a philanthropic cause. While this small piece of information alone may not carry enough weight to implement a league-wide philanthropy ticketing campaign, it should be noted that Gen Z is a particularly philanthropic generation, especially for their wealth status. Gen Zers, also called “Philanthrokids”, are expected to join millennials as the next generation of donors. As of 2017, 57 percent of Gen Z would rather save their money than spend it, and 32 percent were currently donating money (Berg, 2017). It is also important to consider that “Gen Z has grown up exposed to diverse issues, surrounded by technologies and social media. Therefore, from a very young age, they’ve been aware of all the latest news: terrorism, the uncertainty of the economic situation, climate change, and different humanitarian challenges around the world. This hyper-awareness encourages many Gen Z youth to make a difference in this world” (Berg, 2017). When analyzing the philanthropic tendencies of Gen Z, it becomes plausible that they could be incentivized to attend MLB games if it meant that they were supporting a charity or cause that they believed in.

**Affordability.** A clear insight from the research was that Gen Z demands an affordable experience. Whether this had to do with ticket prices, cost of travel, concessions, or parking, it was obvious that Gen Z cared about what they spent their money on. While the added costs of attending MLB games certainly discourages Gen Zers from attending games, it is also important to note that they would attend if there was a sufficient value exchange.

Gen Z is a frugal generation, but they also crave experiences, and valuable experiences are seldom cheap. This generation does not mind spending money if they get what they pay for, but a profound insight from the focus groups was that they consider all financial costs before committing to attending MLB games.



## Recommendations

Based on the insights of the thesis, there are a few recommendations that could help MLB capitalize on Gen Z and influence their attendance. This involves detailing how to build the aforementioned social experience, implement a philanthropic tie-in, and ensure the affordability of attending MLB games. It is important to note that these recommendations should be carried out in addition to MLB's current marketing strategies targeted at Gen Z. Also, MLB must not alienate its existing customer base by changing the on-field product itself.

**Building the Social Experience.** When it comes to building this social experience surrounding the game, there are a few cases within MLB currently that can be replicated and standardized across the league to provide for a more social experience at every MLB game. One prominent example comes from the Atlanta Braves, who in 2017 successfully built and opened a new stadium connected with a premium social experience surrounding their ballpark called The Battery.

The stadium, then Sun Trust Park, now Truist Park, relocated from historic Turner Field in downtown Atlanta to the edges of the city. In the 2019 season, the Braves recorded a total regular season attendance of 2,655,100, which was their greatest numbers since 2007 (MLB, 2019). This attendance record did not simply come from a new stadium, however. The surge can be attributed to the premium social experience that the Braves were selling: The Battery.

The Battery embodies the idea of entertainment as the epicenter of social fun in Atlanta. The space includes office space, apartments, live music venues, shops, and about 60 restaurants and bars that are right in the heart of Braves baseball (Lacques, 2017). When it opened, only half of these venues were open, but now that the entertainment center has had two years to fill up, the Braves have experienced attendance spikes that were unthinkable a decade ago. It is clear that

The Battery has had a profound effect on attendance, because going to a Braves game has transformed from watching a baseball game to watching a baseball game and having the night of your life. This is the type of immersive sports experience that Gen Z has been craving, and the Battery is proving that it is well within reach.

MLB should encourage all of its teams to imitate what the Braves have done, especially those teams that are struggling with bringing younger fans into the ballpark.

**Incorporating Philanthropy.** There are many avenues for incorporating philanthropic elements into MLB. However, for the purpose of positively influencing Gen Z attendance rates, it is necessary that these charitable causes are both important to Gen Z and are directly benefitted by purchasing tickets.

Although MLB teams and the league already contribute significantly to dozens of charities and non-profits, there is no philanthropic tie-in directly related to ticket sales. If there were such a philanthropic collaboration, those who felt passionate about whatever cause that their ticket would benefit would be inclined to purchase tickets, and thus attend the games. The key here is that the individuals buying tickets are incentivized by support for a cause. If MLB wanted to philanthropically incentivize Gen Z, it would need to focus on ticket sales directly benefiting causes that Gen Zers are passionate about.

The existing MLB philanthropic efforts and initiatives revolve around raising awareness and encouraging donations. However, they could support noble causes and increase their attendance rates by implementing a strategy in which a portion of ticket sales directly benefitted select charities and nonprofits.

**Ensuring Affordability.** If MLB were to create more immersive social experiences, they would still be able to keep tickets at an affordable price for Gen Z. For example, the Atlanta

Braves had the 10<sup>th</sup> cheapest average ticket price in the 2019 MLB season, even when offering the entire social package of The Battery in connection with Sun Trust Park (Gough, 2019). The investments made into creating this intersection of entertainment, leisure, and sport are proving to be mutually beneficial between the teams, the fans, the organizations included, and MLB.

With this in mind, MLB teams investing into building immersive social experiences around their ballparks should be able to maintain their existing pricing strategies and still see positive results. However, considering that high costs proved to be a profound barrier for Gen Z respondents in the focus groups, lowering the added costs of attending MLB games could also have a profound effect on Gen Z attendance rates.

**Maintaining Existing Customer Base.** As indicated in the literature review, MLB's fan base is among the oldest in professional sports. Even though it is important for MLB to cater to Gen Z, it is important that they do not alienate older generations. For example, although the focus groups manifested that Gen Zers find the pace of play, length of the games, number of games, and nature of the game of baseball itself to be unappealing, those are the traits that older generations have known and loved for decades. A structural change to the game itself, the product on the field, would disparage a large portion of MLB's current loyal customer base; it would waste away decades of CRM efforts with these customers.

However, MLB does not have to sacrifice its loyal fans in order to acquire new, younger ones. Instead, they can focus on delivering a premium social experience that is wrapped around attending an MLB game. This premium social experience is the customer value within Gen Z that is ready to be captured. The average Gen Z sports fan is unlikely to magically begin enjoying baseball more than football and basketball. However, the in-person viewing nature of

baseball allows for the opportunity to passively watch a game while being entertained by a number of surrounding sources.

While it is important to maintain its older, loyal customer base, MLB should recognize that attracting younger generations will require changing the on-field product itself. This could take the form of speeding up the pace of the game, limiting the number of innings, or making each pitch more exciting. On-field changes could be piloted in MLB's extensive farm system, from Single A ball to Triple A ball, and the most well-received changes could be implemented at the Major League level.

Deciding when to implement changes to the game itself should be rooted in extensive research and cost-benefit analysis to determine when enough older fans have aged out and younger fans will be attracted by a new form of the sport to make it worthwhile. Many sports have changed to make the game more appealing, most notably basketball. Over the last few decades, basketball has become increasingly popular, and this is due in part to its adaptability. With rules like legalizing dunking, adding a three-point line, and implementing a shot clock, the game has become more exciting and fast-paced. Baseball could learn from the changes basketball has made, but they must be implemented at the right time.

**Current Gen Z Marketing.** Since the focus of this thesis is on Gen Z, and an immense portion of Gen Z are not MLB fans, then the marketing strategies employed by MLB should appeal to non-MLB fans. This is what the social experience aims to tackle. However, MLB is currently doing a masterful job of marketing their product: baseball and its players. As mentioned in the literature review, MLB has recently been committed to promoting a sense of individualism and attitude in the game of baseball. Whether this be with the "We Play Loud"

campaign or having a Players' Weekend, Gen Z fans are being sold a product that is fast, exciting, and edgy. MLB should continue to pursue this messaging.

## **Conclusion**

Major League Baseball is at an important turning point. While lucrative sponsorship deals are lifting its financial growth, MLB must address its falling attendance rates. The segment that MLB is struggling the most with is Generation Z, young adults who have increasingly thinning attention spans and no patience for a game that they dub "slow" and "boring." As they grow larger and more influential each day, Gen Z is desperate for excitement, entertainment, and social value, and MLB must appeal to their interests in order to sustain attendance rates across the league.

Secondary research and the focus group findings suggest that Gen Z sports fans would attend more MLB games if the games involved an immersive social experience at an affordable price. As an added incentive to attendance, MLB could also capitalize on the philanthropic nature of Gen Z and drive them to games by channeling a portion of ticket revenue to a charitable cause. All of these strategies can be employed by MLB on a league-wide plan in order to capture the elusive Gen Z.

This league-wide plan would involve each MLB team building social experiences surrounding their ballparks. However, for the strategic implementation of this plan, some ballparks that have traditionally had steady, strong attendance rates like that of Dodger Stadium and Wrigley Field will have the option to maintain their historic appeal. In addition to teams building these social experiences, teams will be encouraged to cut down on the added costs of attending games, specifically keeping concessions at an affordable rate. Teams will also incorporate local philanthropy benefits directly into ticket sales for select games.

**Future Research.** There is ample evidence suggesting Gen Z's attraction towards immersive, consumer-facing social experiences at an affordable price, but further research could strengthen this claim. It would also prove beneficial to research what components optimize these social experiences and how to execute them properly.

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## Appendix

### A. Focus Group Recruiting Email

Dear Friends,

I'm conducting a study to examine Gen Z perceptions of Major League Baseball and attending games.

In order to participate, participants must identify as male or female, aged 18 to 22, and be a sports fan that has attended a professional sporting event.

The focus group will take place via Zoom and will last 45 minutes to 1 hour. 1 hour of MEJO research participation credit will be rewarded to those who participate.

Please share this email with people you know who meet the criteria! My contact info is below and I've attached the study recruitment flyer.

Best,

Mac McArtor

901-573-0514

[macmca@live.unc.edu](mailto:macmca@live.unc.edu)

### B. Morning Focus Group Invitation

Hi, (First Name)!

Thank you for signing up for the Zoom focus group "America's Present Time: Reviving Major League Baseball Attendance by Marketing to Gen Z" this **Friday, April 3rd at 11:00 a.m. Eastern Time**.

This will last approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour, and participation is voluntary. However, those who participate will earn 1 hour of MEJO research pool credit by participating.

Please confirm your availability for Friday's meeting, and I'm looking forward to seeing you there!

Thank you!

-Mac McArtor

Below are the details of the Zoom meeting:

Topic: MLB Focus Group with Mac McArtor  
Time: Apr 3, 2020 11:00 AM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting  
<https://unc.zoom.us/j/380646301>

Meeting ID: 380 646 301

### **C. Afternoon Focus Group Invitation**

Hi, (First Name)!

Thank you for signing up for the Zoom focus group “America’s Present Time: Reviving Major League Baseball Attendance by Marketing to Gen Z” this **Friday, April 3rd at 1:30 p.m. Eastern Time**.

This will last approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour, and participation is voluntary. However, those who participate will earn 1 hour of MEJO research pool credit by participating.

Please confirm your availability for Friday’s meeting, and I’m looking forward to seeing you there!

Thank you!

-Mac McArtor

Below are the details of the Zoom meeting:

Andrew Mcartor is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: Afternoon MLB Focus Group with Mac McArtor  
Time: Apr 3, 2020 01:30 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting  
<https://unc.zoom.us/j/574310066>

Meeting ID: 574 310 066

### **D. Focus Group Guide**

#### **FOCUS GROUP GUIDE**

##### **Introduction**

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. My name is Mac McArtor, and I am a senior in the UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media. My honors thesis aims to understand Gen Z perceptions of professional sports and the MLB. During our time together, I

will ask about your experiences as a sports fan. Our discussion will last for about 1 hour and your responses will be confidential. Your name will not be included in the transcription of this focus group discussion nor will you be identified in the thesis. If it is all right with you, I will audio record our focus group discussion to make sure that we are capturing your thoughts accurately. Even though we will emphasize to all participants that comments made during the focus group session should be kept confidential, it is possible that participants may repeat comments outside of the group at some time in the future. Therefore, we encourage you to be as honest and open as you can, but remain aware of our limits in protecting confidentiality. Does that sound ok? Does anyone have any questions before we begin?

## **GRAND TOUR QUESTION**

***Before we begin, I would like to get to know you all a little bit better. Let's go around the table and have each person briefly share his or her best in-person sporting event experience.***

***Thank you! Let's get started.***

## **QUESTIONS ABOUT SPORTS IN GENERAL**

***We will begin with some questions about professional sports in general.***

Why do people like you enjoy watching professional sports on television?

- Loyal fan of player/team?
- Social viewing?
- I played sports myself?
- General entertainment?

Why do people like you enjoy attending professional sporting events in person?

- First-hand experience?
- Meet the players?
- To get on TV?
- Social reasons, going out with friends

How is the in-person experience different than watching the game on television/streaming device?

- Feel like I'm part of the game
- More invested, not passively viewing
- Live entertainment during breaks

What prevents people like you from attending a professional sporting event in person?

- Expensive parking
- Expensive concessions
- Ticket costs too high
- Seats I can afford are bad

- No way to get to the game
- Sometimes last too long (can't leave whenever you want, then it's a waste of money)
- Risk of bad weather if outside

***Now I'm going to ask some questions about Major League Baseball specifically.***

How would you describe the experience of watching an MLB game on television/streaming device? Why do you say that?

- Very slow, boring
- Not sure what's going on all of the time
- Awesome, so many things going on each pitch
- Only fun to watch in the last couple of innings

How about attending an MLB game in person? What attracts people like you to MLB games?

- Entertainment
- Memories that last a lifetime
- Cheering on my team/players
- Experience of watching game, eating, drinking, socializing

Why do you think some people like you don't attend MLB games – or don't attend games very often? Why do you say that?

- Expensive parking
- Expensive concessions
- Ticket costs too high
- Seats I can afford are bad
- No way to get to the game
- Sometimes lasts too long
- Risk of bad weather if outside
- The game isn't really fast enough

## **FUTURE**

***Now I'm going to ask you to project yourself into the future. You are college students now but you won't be forever. Imagine you have landed a job in a city where you have access to a MLB team. So proximity isn't an issue. (PAUSE)***

Why might you purchase tickets?

- Become more connected to the city/cheer for the hometown team
- Social
- Unique promotions like rally towels, t-shirts, etc.
- If there's good food/drink venues at and around the stadium (cool area of town)
- I like baseball and want to go to MLB games

What might prevent you from purchasing tickets?

- I'm not a big baseball fan
- I don't know if anyone would want to go with me
- There are more fun things to do in the city than attend a baseball game
- Expense

Why might you consider (or not consider) purchasing season tickets or a "mini-pack" of tickets?

- Time
- Money

What could be done to encourage people like you to purchase and attend more MLB games?

- Affordable ticket bundling
- Pricing deals for night games (makes it a fun, affordable night out with friends)
- Food and beverage affordability
- Have the surrounding area be fun enough to where the game isn't the only experience I'm paying for

**CLOSE**

That covers the questions I wanted to ask. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you again for participating in this focus group and assisting with my honors thesis. \